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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular,

JULY 1st, 1856.

THE ORCHESTRAL CONDUCTOR.

By HECTOR BERLIOZ.*

(Continued from page 246).

An orchestra which does not watch the conducting-stick, has no conductor. Often, after a pedal-point, for instance, the conductor is obliged to refrain from marking the decisive gesture which is to determine the coming in of the orchestra, until he sees the eyes of all the performers fixed upon him. It is the duty of the conductor, during rehearsal, to accustom them to look towards him simultaneously at the important moment.



If, in the above bar, of which the first beat, marking a pedal-point, may be prolonged indefinitely, the rule were not observed that I have just indicated, the passage—



could not be uttered with firmness and unity; the players, not watching the conductor's stick, could not know when he decides the second beat, and resumes the movement suspended by the pedal-point.

This obligation for the performers to look at their conductor, necessarily implies an equal obligation on his part to let himself be well seen by them. He should,—whatever may be the disposal of the orchestra, whether on rows of steps, or on a horizontal plane,—place himself so as to form the centre of all surrounding eyes.

A conductor requires,—to exalt him and place him well in sight,—an especial platform, elevated in proportion as the number of performers is large and occupies much space. His desk should not be so high, as that the portion sustaining the score shall hide his face. For the expression of his countenance has much to do with the influence he exercises; and if there be no conductor for an orchestra that does not and will not watch him, there is hardly any either, if he cannot be well seen.

As to the employment of noises,—of any kind whatever, produced either by the stick of the conductor upon his desk, or by his foot upon the platform—they can call forth no other than unreserved

reprehension. It is worse than a bad method; it is a barbarism. Only, if, in a theatre, the stage evolutions prevent the chorus-singers from seeing the conducting-stick, the conductor is compelled,—in order to ensure, after a pause, the taking up of a point by the chorus,—to indicate this point by marking the beat which precedes it, with a slight tap of his stick upon the desk. This exceptional circumstance, is the only one which can warrant the employment of an *indicating noise*; and even then, it is to be regretted that recourse must be had to it.

While speaking of chorus-singers, and of their operations in theatres, it may here be observed, that chorus-masters often allow themselves to beat time at the side-scenes, without seeing the conductor's stick, frequently even without hearing the orchestra. The result is, that, this time beaten more or less ill, not corresponding with that of the conductor, inevitably induces a rhythmical discordance between the choral and instrumental bodies, and subverts all unity instead of tending to maintain it.

There is another traditional barbarism, which lies within the province of an intelligent and active conductor to abolish. If a choral or instrumental piece be performed behind the scenes, without accompaniment from the principal orchestra, another conductor is absolutely essential to conduct it. If the orchestra accompany this portion, the first conductor, who hears the distant music, is then strictly bound to *let himself be guided* by the second; and to follow, *by ear*, his time. But if—as frequently happens in modern music—the sound of the chief orchestra hinders the conductor from hearing that which is being performed at a distance from him, the intervention of a special conducting mechanism becomes indispensable, in order to establish instantaneous communication between him and the distant performers. Many attempts, more or less ingenious, have been made of this kind; the result of which has not everywhere answered expectation. That of Covent Garden Theatre, in London, moved by the conductor's foot, acts tolerably well. But the *electric metronome*, put up by Mr. Van Brue in the Brussels Theatre, leaves nothing to be desired. It consists of an apparatus of copper ribbons, leading from a Voltaic battery placed beneath the stage, being attached to the conductor's desk, and terminating in a movable stick fastened at one end on a pivot before a board, at a certain distance from the orchestral conductor. To this latter's desk is affixed a key of copper, something like the ivory key of a pianoforte; it is elastic, and provided on the interior with a protuberance of about a quarter of an inch long. Immediately beneath this protuberance, is a little cup, also of copper, filled with quicksilver. At the instant when the orchestral conductor, desiring to mark any particular beat of his bar, presses with the forefinger of his left-hand (his right being occupied in holding, as usual, the conducting-stick) the copper key, this key is lowered, the protuberance passes into the cup filled with quicksilver, a slight electric spark is emitted, and the stick placed at the other extremity of the copper ribbon makes an oscillation before its

* *A Treatise upon Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration; containing an Exact Table of the Compass, a Detail of the Mechanism, and a Study of the Quality of Tone, and Expressive Character of Various Instruments; accompanied by Numerous Examples in Score, from the Works of the Greatest Masters, and from some Unpublished Works of the Author. New Edition, revised, corrected, augmented by several additional (copyright) chapters on Newly-Invented Instruments, and on the whole Art of the Orchestral Conductor.* By Hector Berlioz. Op. 10. Translated from the French by Mary Cowden Clarke. Published in Novello's Library for the diffusion of Musical Knowledge. Theoretical Series, No. VII. Price 12s., bound

board. This communication of the fluid, and this movement, are quite simultaneous; whatever the distance be that is traversed.

The performers being grouped behind the scenes, their eyes fixed upon the stick of the electric metronome, are thus directly subjected to the conductor's sway; who could thus—were it needful—conduct from the middle of the Opera orchestra in Paris, a piece of music performed at Versailles.

It is merely requisite to agree beforehand with the chorus-singers, or with their conductor (if, as an additional precaution, they have one), the way in which the orchestral conductor beats the time; whether he mark all the principal beats, or only the first of the bar,—since the oscillations of the stick moved by electricity being always from right to left, they indicate nothing precise in this respect.

When I first used, at Brussels, the valuable instrument I have just endeavoured to describe, its action presented one objection. Each time that the copper key of my desk underwent the pressure of my left forefinger, it struck, underneath, another plate of copper; and, notwithstanding the delicacy of this contact, it produced a little hard noise, which, during the pauses of the orchestra, ended by attracting the attention of the audience—to the detriment of the musical effect.

I pointed out this defect to Mr. Van Bruge, who substituted for the lower plate of copper, the little cup filled with quicksilver, previously mentioned; and into which the upper protuberance entered, so as to establish the electric current without causing the slightest noise.

Nothing more remains now, attached to the use of this mechanism, but the crackling of the spark at the moment of its emission; and this crackling is too slight, for it to be heard by the public.

This metronome is not expensive to put up; it costs £16—at the utmost. Large lyric theatres, churches, and concert-rooms, should long ago have been provided with one. Excepting at the Brussels Theatre, however, it is nowhere to be found. This would appear incredible, were it not that the carelessness of the majority of directors of institutions where music forms a feature, is well known; together with their instinctive aversion from whatever may disturb old-established customs, their indifference for the interests of the Art, their parsimony wherever a musical outlay is needed, and the utter ignorance of the principles of our Art among almost all those in whose hands rests the ordering of its destiny.

I have not yet said all on the subject of those dangerous auxiliaries named chorus-masters. Very few of them are sufficiently versed in the Art, to conduct a musical performance, so that the orchestral conductor can depend upon them. He cannot therefore watch them too closely, when he is compelled to submit to their coadjutorship.

The most to be dreaded are those whom age has deprived of activity and energy. The maintenance of all time of any vivacity is an impossibility to them. Whatever may be the degree of quickness printed at the head of a piece that is confided to their con-

ducting, little by little they slacken its rate, until the rhythm be reduced to a certain medium slowness, that seems to harmonize with the pace at which their blood flows, and the general feebleness of their organization.

It must in truth be added, that old men are not the only ones with whom composers run this risk. There are men in the prime of life, of a lymphatic temperament, whose blood seems to circulate *moderato*. If they have to conduct an allegro assai, they gradually slacken it to *moderato*; if, on the contrary, it be a largo or an andante sostenuto, provided the piece be prolonged, they will attain,—by dint of a progressive animation, long before the end,—at a *moderato*. The *moderato* is their natural pace; and they recur to it as infallibly as a pendulum would, after having been a moment hurried or slackened in its oscillations.

These sort of people are the born enemies of all characteristic music; and the greatest destroyers of style. May Fate preserve the orchestral conductor at any cost from their co-operation.

Once, in a large town (which I will not name), there was to be performed behind the scenes a very simple chorus, written in $\frac{3}{8}$, allegretto. The aid of the chorus-master became necessary. He was an old man.

The time in which this chorus was to be taken, having been first agreed upon by the orchestra, our Nestor followed it pretty decently during the first few bars; but soon after, the slackening became such that there was no continuing without rendering the piece perfectly ridiculous. It was recommenced twice, thrice, four times; a full half-hour was occupied in ever-increasingly vexatious efforts; but always with the same result. The preservation of allegretto time was absolutely impossible to the worthy man. At last the orchestral conductor, out of all patience, came and begged him not to conduct at all; he had hit upon an expedient:—He caused the chorus-singers to simulate a march-movement, raising each foot alternately, without moving on. This movement, being in exactly the same time as the dual rhythm of the $\frac{3}{8}$ in a bar, allegretto, the chorus-singers, who were no longer hindered by their director, at once performed the piece as though they had sung marching; with no less unity than regularity, and without slackening the time.

I acknowledge, however, that many chorus-masters, or sub-conductors of orchestras, are sometimes of real utility, and are even indispensable for the maintenance of unity among very large masses of performers. When these masses are obliged to be so disposed as that one portion of these players or chorus-singers turn their back on the conductor; he needs a certain number of sub-beaters of the time, placed before those of the performers who cannot see the chief conductor, and charged with repeating all his signals. In order that this repetition shall be precise, the sub-conductors must be careful never to take their eyes off the chief conductor's stick for a single instant. If, in order to look at their score, they cease for only three bars, to watch him, a dis-

crepancy arises immediately between their time and his; and all is lost.

In a festival where 1200 performers were assembled under my direction, at Paris, I had to employ four chorus-masters, stationed at the four corners of the vocal mass, and two sub-conductors, one of whom directed the wind-instruments, and the other the instruments of percussion. I had earnestly besought them to look towards me incessantly; they did not omit without the slightest discrepancy of rhythm established amidst our 1200 performers the most perfect unity ever witnessed.

With one or more electric metronomes now, it seems no longer necessary to have recourse to this means. One might, in fact, thus conduct without difficulty chorus-singers turning their back towards the chief conductor; but, attentive and intelligent sub-conductors would always be, nevertheless, in such a case, preferable to a machine. They have not only to beat the time, like the metronomic staff; but they have also to speak to the groups around them, to call their attention to nice shades of execution, and after bar-rests, to remind them at the moment of their coming-in again.

In a space arranged as a semicircular amphitheatre, the orchestral conductor, may alone conduct a considerable number of performers; all eyes then being able to look towards him. Nevertheless, the employment of a certain number of sub-conductors appears to me preferable to the singleness of individual direction, on account of the great distance between the chief conductor and the extreme points of the vocal and instrumental body.

The more distant the orchestral conductor is from the performers he directs, the more his influence over them is diminished.

The best way would be to have several sub-conductors, with several electric metronomes beating before their eyes the principal beats of the bar.

(*To be continued.*)

MUSIC

AMONG THE POETS AND POETICAL WRITERS.

By MARY COWDEN CLARKE.

(*Continued from page 235.*)

POETRY has struck the chords of that music which dwells in dread sounds. Those of a sea-fight are thus vigorously recorded:—

"At midnight the sound grew into a roll
As the sound of all gath'nings from pole to pole,
From pole unto pole, and from clime to clime,
Like the roll of the wheels of the hasting of time;—
A sound as of cities, and sound as of swords
Sharpening, and solemn and terrible words,
And laughter as solemn, and thunderous drumming,
A tread as if all the world were coming.
And then was a lull, and soft voices sweet
Call'd into music those terrible feet,
Which rising on wings, lo! the earth went round
To the burn of their speed with a golden sound."

Leigh Hunt.

"In the sea it happed them to meet;
Up goeth the trump, and for to shout and sheet, [shoot]
And painen them to set on with the sun;
With grisly sound out goeth the great gun,
And heartily they hurtle all at once,
And from the top down cometh the great stones,
In goeth the grapinel so full of crooks,
Among the ropes ran the shearing hooks,
In with the poleax presseth he; and he,
Behind the mast beginneth he to flee,
And out again, and driveth him on board,
He sticketh him upon his spear's orde, [point]
He rent the sail with hookès like a scythe.
He bringeth the cup, and biddeth them be blithe,
He poureth peasen upon the hatches slider, [slippery]
With pottes full of lime they gone togider, [together]
And thus the longe day in fight they spend."—*Chaucer.*

"All the living things that heard
That deadly earth-shock disappear'd:
The wild birds flew; the wild dogs fled,
And howling left the unbured dead.
The camels from their keepers broke;
The distant steer forsook the yoke—
The nearer steed plunged o'er the plain,
And burst his girth, and tore his rein;
The bull-frog's note, from out the marsh,
Deep-mouth'd arose, and doubly harsh;
The wolves yell'd on the cavern'd hill
Where echo roll'd in thunder still;
The jackal's troop, in gather'd cry,
Bay'd from afar complainingly,
With a mix'd and mournful sound,
Like crying babe, and beaten hound:
With sudden wing, and ruffled breast,
The eagle left his rocky nest,
And mounted nearer to the sun,
The clouds beneath him seem'd so dun;
Their smoke assail'd his startled beak,
And made him higher soar and shriek—
Thus was Corinth lost and won!"—*Byron.*

"Has not the soul, the being of your life,
Received a shock of awful consciousness,
In some calm season, when these lofty rocks
At night's approach bring down the unclouded sky,
To rest upon their circumambient walls?
A temple framing of dimensions vast,
And yet not too enormous for the sound
Of human anthems,—choral song, or burst
Sublime of instrumental harmony,
To glorify the Eternal! What if these
Did never break the stillness that prevails
Here,—if the solemn nightingale be mute,
And the soft woodlark here did never chant
Her vespers,—Nature fails not to provide
Impulse and utterance. The whispering air
Sends inspiration from the shadowy heights,
And blind recesses of the caverned rocks;
The little rills, and waters numberless,
Inaudible by daylight, blend their notes
With the loud streams: and often, at the hour
When issue forth the first pale stars, is heard,
Within the circuit of this fabric huge,
One voice—the solitary raven, flying
Athwart the concave of the dark blue dome,
Unseen, perchance above all power of sight—
An iron knell! with echoes from afar
Faint—and still fainter—as the cry, with which
The wanderer accompanies her flight
Through the calm region, fades upon the ear,
Diminishing by distance till it seemed
To expire; yet from the abyss is caught again,
And yet again recovered!"—*Wordsworth.*